

The Reasons For The Change In The Prayer Timetable Of Masjid Al-Ghurabaa'

This article explains why the Shoora of Masjid al-Ghurabaa' have amended the timings of Fajr and 'Ishaa' in the prayer timetable. We will start by explaining the timings of Fajr and 'Ishaa' prayers.

The Timing Of Fajr According To The Sharee'ah

There are in fact two Fajrs (dawns);

a) a false Fajr: It is not allowed to pray the Fajr prayer at this time and eating is allowed for the person who intends to fast that day. The false Fajr is a rising vertical column of whiteness which appears looking like the tail of a fox.

b) a true Fajr: At this time for the person who wants to fast, eating becomes prohibited so he has to stop eating and it becomes allowed to pray the Fajr prayer. This is the time at which whiteness in the sky appears horizontally, on the length and breadth of the horizon known as True Dawn.

The two Fajrs are explained in the hadeeth reported by Ibn Abbaas (radiyallaahu anhu) that the Messenger of Allaah (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"There are two Fajr (dawns). As for the first, it does not prevent eating (for the fasting person) nor does it permit prayer (the Fajr prayer). As for the other it prohibits eating and allows the prayer."
[Ibn Khuzaimah and Haakim]

Also, the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said [to the one intending to fast];

"eat and drink and do not let the tall vertical brightness deceive you, but eat and drink until the reddish one spreads horizontally for you.."
[at-Tirmidhee, Abu Daawood and others. Its isnaad is Saheeh]

The "tall vertical brightness" refers to the false Fajr, and the "reddish one spreads horizontally" refers to the true fajr.

Shaykh al-Albaanee, may Allaah have mercy on him mentioned: "And know that there is no contradiction between his description of the light of the true fajr as "red" and the description of it by the Exalted in His statement: **"The white thread..."**¹ because the meaning, and Allaah Knows best, is the white which is mixed with red, or sometimes its white, and sometimes its red, as this differs with the differing of the months and horizons."

The time of Fajr ends at sunrise, but is recommended to perform it at its earliest time, provided that one is certain the true Fajr has come in. Aa'ishah (radiyallaahu anhaa) narrated:

"The believing women, covered with their veiling sheets, used to attend

¹ i.e. the verse: **"and eat and drink until the white thread (light) of dawn appears to you distinct from the black thread (darkness of night),.."** [al-Baqarah (2):187]

the Fajr prayer with Allaah's Messenger, and after finishing the Salaat (prayer) they would return to their homes and nobody could recognise them because of the darkness." [Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree]

The Timing Of 'Ishaa' According To The Sharee'ah

'Abdullaah bin 'Amr (radiyallaahu anhu) reported the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) saying:

"...and the time of the Maghrib prayer (lasts) as long as the spreading appearance of the redness above the horizon after sunset does not sink down,.." [Saheeh Muslim]

Ibn Qudaamah says in volume two of al-Mughni: "There is no difference of opinion that the entering of the time 'Ishaa' is the setting of the *shafaq* (twilight) ...[and] that the shafaq by which the time of Maghrib ends, and the time of 'Ishaa' enters, is the red one."

So from this we know that the time for 'Ishaa' begins from the time which the redness of the horizon disappears. As for the end of the 'Ishaa', this is until the middle of the night, as also mentioned in the hadith of 'Abdullaah bin 'Amr (radiyallaahu anhu) quoted above:

"..And the time of 'Ishaa' prayer is until the middle of the night."

Determining The Prayer Times Is Not An Exact Science

The Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said:

"We are an unlettered nation; we neither read, *nor do we calculate*; a month is like this (29 days) and like this (30 days)." [Agreed Upon]

Prayer times should be determined according to actual observation and not according to calculations. As for the timings of sunrise, Dhuhr, 'Asr, and sunset, computer calculations can be easily verified by observation, as these times depend on the position of the sun.² However, the beginning of Fajr and the beginning of 'Ishaa' *do not depend on the position of the sun, but depend on the amount of light in the sky* (as described in the hadith above). This can only be verified by actual observation.

Unlike the timings of sunrise and sunset, which can be determined fairly precisely, the beginning of Fajr (when the very faint light of morning begins to spread horizontally in the darkness of night) and the beginning of 'Ishaa' (when the red twilight disappears) is not strictly quantifiable.

Shaykh al-Albaanee mentions that Ibn Umm Makhtoom (radiyallaahu anhu), the blind man, used to give the second Adhaan, the Adhaan that makes eating prohibited and indicates that it is now time for the Fajr Prayer. He would climb upon the roof of the mosque and wait until someone passing by saw the dawn. So when someone saw that the dawn had appeared and spread across the horizon, they would then say to him, "It is morning. It is morning." Then he

² There can still be a margin of error in the calculations pertaining to sunrise and sunset because, as Shaykh al-Albaanee mentioned, "these time-tables are based upon astronomical calculations which count the land as being a single flat plane."

would give the Adhaan. Hence the Adhaan of Ibn Umm Makhtoom was *after* the Fajr had appeared, and had been seen by the people. So therefore there is latitude in the affair, since the mu'adh-dhin would be delayed in giving the Adhaan until he heard the people telling him, "It is morning, it is morning." And then Allaah's Messenger, (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) said, "If one of you hears the call to Prayer and the vessel is in his hand, then let him not put it down until he has fulfilled his need from it."³

Shaykh Siddeeq Hasan Khan said, "And from that which is necessary to be made known: is that Allaah, 'Azza wa Jall, has not burdened his slaves regarding the knowledge of the times for prayer with that which causes hardship upon them or difficulty, for the religion is easy, and the Sharee'ah is forgiving and simple, rather he, made for the times detectable physical signs that everyone is aware of."⁴

Scientific Calculations Are Unable To Determine The Timings Of Fajr And 'Ishaa'

All of the main observatories state that determining the times of the true dawn (Fajr) and end of twilight ('Ishaa') are problematic. For example the Royal Greenwich Observatory states;

"There is no precise definition of "dawn". If it is interpreted as the time of "first light", dawn corresponds to a depression between 18 and 12 degrees⁵ but it is not possible to be more precise".

Hence the most famous observatory in the world is unable to tell us when "first light" (i.e. the time of Fajr) occurs but states that it is between 18 and 12 degrees.

Up until now, Masjid al-Ghurabaa' have used the timetable of Regents Park Masjid. This calendar determines Fajr and 'Ishaa' according to a calculation of the times at which the sun is at a certain distance below the horizon.⁶ According to this calculation, 'Ishaa' occurs when the sun is 18 degrees below the western horizon. Such a methodology is problematic for several reasons:

Firstly, according to the astronomers, the disappearance of twilight and the time of dawn, occurs anytime between 12 to 18 degrees. So why fix it at 18 degrees? The smallest time lag between 18 and 12 degrees is forty minutes in Britain. So by fixing the Fajr time at 18 degrees, leaves a minimum margin of error of 40 minutes.

Secondly, even if we were to use fixed degrees (say 18 degrees) to determine the Fajr and 'Ishaa' times, the amount of light in the sky when the sun is 18 degrees below the horizon during the summer will be different from that of the winter. This is particularly true the further one is away from the equator.⁷ Hence one cannot apply a fixed solar depression level for the whole year.

³ abridged from Silsilah al-Hudaa wan-Noor, Tape No. 590

⁴ Ar-Rawdhah an-Nadiyyah

⁵ i.e. when the sun is between 12 and 18 degrees below the horizon

⁶ the distance, measured in degrees, is referred to as the *solar depression level*.

⁷ For areas near or at the equator, the twilight disappears exactly 75 mins after Maghrib, or 18 degrees in all seasons. At, higher latitudes, such as England, it disappears anything from 66 to 100 minutes (9 to 13.6 degrees) after Maghrib. (moonsighting.com)

Finally, *and most importantly*, the Sharee'ah is interested in the **amount of light** in the sky when determining the start of the Fajr and 'Ishaa' prayers, and not the distance of the sun below the horizon.

Given that we were not aware of any detailed research determining Fajr and 'Ishaa' according to actual sightings, we had no alternative but to rely upon the timetable of Regents Park Masjid.⁸

Alhamdulillah, we have now come across a substantial year long research in Blackburn in which the timings of the disappearance of the twilight and the timings of true dawn were recorded *based upon actual observation*. Given that actual observation is the basis of determining prayer times, we presented the findings of the Blackburn research to Shaykh Faisal al-Jaasim who advised us to use their timings for Fajr and 'Ishaa'. Due to the difference in sunrise/sunset times in Luton and Blackburn, slight adjustments have been made.

The Shoora, Masjid al-Ghurabaa'

⁸ This is not to doubt the sincerity of the administration at Regents Park Masjid, who decided upon this method based upon their ijtihaad.